

WHAT

ARE

KIWIS



KIWI CAPERS

making the conservation message fun

Last summer over 100,000 people visited a kiwi exhibition at the Auckland Museum. Called the Kiwi Kids Activity Centre, the display showed children that kiwi are in trouble, they can be helped, and that conservation can be enjoyable. CATHY BARR from Forest and Bird's Auckland office explains how it happened.

LATE LAST YEAR a five-year recovery programme for the kiwi was set in train. Launched by the Department of Conservation in partnership with Forest and Bird and sponsored by the Bank of New Zealand (see *Forest & Bird* November 1991), the kiwi recovery plan is designed to promote research and action which will ensure the survival in the wild of this country's national symbol.

To help spread the message for kiwi conservation, a major educational display on kiwi was created at the Auckland Institute and Museum. The display was part of the museum's summer promotion on the New Zealand ratites – that ancient flightless family of birds which includes the kiwi and moa.

Forest and Bird was approached by the museum and asked to assist with informa-

tion for an interactive children's display. The centre was designed by Jenny Rattenbury, a volunteer at Forest and Bird's Auckland office, and built by volunteers and children from Point Chevalier Primary School.

The display emphasised the features that distinguish the three species of kiwi from other birds – coarse feathers, inability to fly and nostrils at the end of the beak. Having been shown why the kiwi is special, visitors were then told of the dangers which threaten the survival of this bird and how they can be overcome. Using colourful displays, storytelling, games, drawing competitions and a tunnel to crawl through to discover the bush at night, children were told of the problems facing kiwi today.

One of the reasons for the success of the display was that, unlike many traditional museum exhibitions, children were encouraged to be involved, not just to

look and listen. They could touch and take part in some of the exhibits. They were asked to draw pictures of kiwi in trouble, to stroke a kiwi and feel its coarse feathers, and to play the kiwi version of snakes and ladders.

Children also acted as guides during the exhibition – a first for the museum. These "kiwi kids" from Forest and Bird's Kiwi Conservation Club and Point Chevalier School were first given training sessions. The young guides dressed in kiwi costumes helped to break down the formality of the museum environment. Visiting children did not feel that they were in a classroom being taught by an adult.

Public response was enthusiastic and museum staff are keen to see similar exhibitions on natural conservation themes in the future. The display was successful not only for the high number of visitors, but also for the degree to which it raised children's awareness of a major conservation issue. As a result of this reception,